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STORY OF THE FIERY FURNACE.

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The greatest of the kings of Babylon was called Nebuchadnezzar. He subdued many of the neighbouring countries, and brought back great quantities of gold and silver. Wishing to do honour to his god and display his own wealth and power, he caused an image of gold to be made, sixty cubits high,—as high as a tall tree. The image was set up in a large plain, where it might be easily seen. Orders were sent to every part of the empire, commanding all officers of government to come to the dedication of the image.

The day came. The golden image, raised high, was sparkling in the sunbeams. All around it, far as the eye could reach, the plain was covered with people. There were nobles richly decked with jewels, and soldiers clad in shining armour. Bands of musicians were scattered here and there, with instruments of various kinds. Suddenly silence was enjoined, and every sound was hushed. Then a herald, with a loud voice, commanded all the people in the name of the king to fall down and worship the golden image as soon as they heard the sound of music. If any person refused to obey, he was to be cast the same hour into a burning furnace. Immediately the bands of music began to play, and in an

instant, that multitude of people had prostrated themselves on the ground before the golden image.

Three persons, however, remained standing. Who were they? They were three Jewish princes. The Jews were a very ancient nation, who worshipped the one true God. They received a beautiful fertile country to dwell in; and so long as they served God faithfully, they were prosperous. Often, however, they forsook the worship of God, and he allowed their enemies to oppress them. The King of Babylon had burnt their capital, and carried many of them away captive. Some of the captive Jews were so talented, that the King of Babylon raised them to high offices. The favour of the King excited the envy of

the Babylonians, who thought the refusal of the Jewish princes to bow down to the golden image, a good opportunity of causing their ruin.

The enemies of the Jewish princes went eagerly to the King with their complaints. They began by saying, "O King, live for ever." They then reminded him of the command he had given to worship the image, and of the threatened punishment. They ended by saying, "There are certain Jews, whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon; these men, O King, have not regarded thee; they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

In a great rage, the King commanded the three Jewish princes to be immediately brought before

him. The King said to them, "Is it true ye do not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready, at what time ye hear all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, well; but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour, into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Why did the three Jewish Princes not fall down before the golden image although they were threatened with a cruel death if they refused? Because they worshipped the one true God, the Creator and Lord of the universe. To worship any other would be rebellion against Him. The one

true God also strictly forbids the bowing down to images. The Jewish princes nobly determined to obey God rather than man. Calmly, but firmly, they said to the king, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. But if not, be it known unto thee O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Upon receiving this answer, the King's face became black and swollen with rage, and he said to his servants, "Heat the furnace seven times hotter than it is wont to be heated." When this was done, he commanded the mightiest men in his army to bind the Jewish princes and cast them into the furnace. So intense was

the heat, that it scorched to death the soldiers who went only to its mouth to cast in the Jews. The

princes fell down bound into the midst of the flames.

The King sat at a little distance, watching to see these men, who had dared to disobey him; burnt to ashes. But why does the King, as he looks at the furnace, rise pale with astonishment and dread? He says to his nobles, "Did we not cast *three* men bound into the fire?" They answered, "True O King." Then the King said, "Lo I see *four* men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

The King then went to the mouth of the furnace and said to the three princes, "Ye servants of the most high God, come forth." Then the Jewish princes came

out of the furnace. The King and his nobles and generals were astonished to find that not a hair of the head of the princes had been singed, nor had a thread of their dress been scorched; nor did they even smell of fire: fire had done nothing but burn their bonds. Then the King broke out into praises of the great God who had delivered his servants from the devouring fire, and he raised the Jewish princes to still higher offices.

The above history is given in the Bible, the true Veda, to teach us very important lessons. What are these?

1. *We should never worship idols.* Idolatry is very foolish. Why should a man bow down to the work of his own hands? The

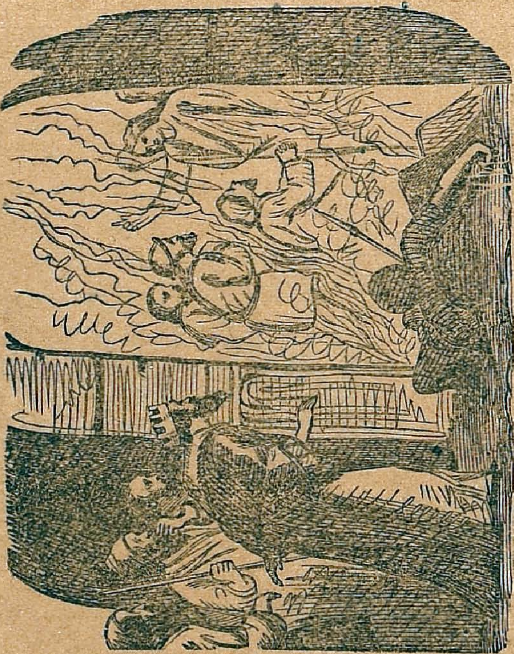
excuse is sometimes made that the idol is to remind the worshippers of God. How would a great king feel if his subjects kept a toad in order that they might remember him? Idolatry is most displeasing to the great God of heaven, and He will severely punish persons guilty of it, unless they repent.

2. *Whatever others may do, we should always do what is right.* We must not follow a multitude to do evil. This is no excuse. If we saw a band of dacoits plundering a house and we did as they did, should we be excused by the Judge? Although all around us may do wrong, although our friends may entreat us, although we may be threatened with the loss of all our poss-

essions, and a cruel death if we do not comply, yet we must obey God, and do what is right. Hear what the great Teacher says, "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

3. *If we are called upon to suffer affliction for God's sake, we shall be comforted and abundantly rewarded.* Although the three princes were cast into a furnace, the Son of God was with them. If we suffer for righteousness' sake, God will so fill our hearts with consolation that we shall rejoice. Jesus, the Son of God, says, "Every one that hath forsaken houses or brethren for my name's sake shall receive an hun-

dred fold, and shall inherit eternal life."

We cannot, however, get to heaven through our own merits. We have all sinned against God, times without number, and deserve to be cast into hell. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became man and suffered and died in our room. God now freely offers pardon to all who trust in Jesus as their Saviour and repent of their sins. Believe in Him and worship the one true God alone. Seek to have your heart purified by God's Holy Spirit. Determine by God's help that you will always do what is right, whatever others may do. Thus will you be happy in this world and in the next.

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